

Mixsawbah State Fish Hatchery renewal

Hatchery repair will ensure long-term strength of trout and salmon program

The Department of Natural Resources will begin rehabilitating Mixsawbah State Fish Hatchery near Walkerton in fall 2005. Mixsawbah SFH is one of two state hatcheries producing Chinook and Coho salmon, along with two strains of steelhead trout, for stocking into Lake Michigan and Lake Michigan tributaries.

"The DNR is committed to finding innovative ways to fund long-needed repairs," said DNR Director Kyle Hupfer. We recently went after and received \$500,000 in state General Fund money that will be used as leverage to pull in more than a million additional federal dollars for fish hatchery repairs. It is of vital importance to maintain a system capable of supplying Hoosiers an abundance of sport fish."

DNR will begin hatchery reinvestment at Mixsawbah SFH. A recent DNR Hatchery Facility Needs Assessment identified Mixsawbah's piping problems as the number-one infrastructure concern in the state's hatchery system.

Hatchery manager Tom Schwartz says repairs will shut down the hatchery for about a year. "When Mixsawbah was constructed 30 years ago, welded steel piping was used for the hatchery's water supply system," said Schwartz. "Much of the steel piping has corroded. It's just a matter of time before a serious failure occurs. Temporary repairs have kept production going so far.

"Controlling the shutdown minimizes the impact to trout and salmon anglers and avoids catastrophic production losses that would occur if the water supply failed while fish were in the hatchery,"

Schwartz also says next year might be as good a time as any to stock fewer fish due to growing concerns about a dip in the Lake Michigan forage fish community.

DNR plans to minimize the loss of fish production at the hatchery by releasing more but younger trout from Bodine State Fish Hatchery in Mishawaka. Bodine SFH is Indiana's second Lake Michigan trout and salmon hatchery. DNR is also negotiating fish trades with neighboring states to help minimize production losses.

State fisheries biologists predict a 60 percent reduction in Coho salmon stocked into Indiana tributaries of Lake Michigan during 2006. Lake Michigan anglers will notice these Coho stocking adjustment effects in spring 2008. The adjustments should impact Coho tributary fishing during 2008 and 2009.

Chinook salmon stocking impacts are expected to be minimal due to planned fish trades, a long-standing fish stocking practice in which states assist one another when fish shortages or surpluses occur.

The hatchery shutdown will also temporarily stop spring stocking of Skamania steelhead trout in 2006 and 2007. Spring-stocked Mixsawbah Skamania steelhead take 14 months to raise.

The DNR will offset Mixsawbah's steelhead by stocking younger steelhead raised at Bodine SFH. Bodine SFH will raise Mixsawbah SFH's 180,000 Skamania steelhead to a size of 4-or-more inches and stock them in September. Any impact to the Lake Michigan stream Skamania fishery will occur during the third summer following stocking of smaller Skamania trout.

Bodine SFH will also raise Mixsawbah's 120,000 winter-run trout assignment to a size of 2.5-or-more inches and stock in September.

Indiana's Lake Michigan brown trout stocking will not be affected by the shutdown. Indiana trades fish with Illinois to obtain brown trout.

"Our reinvestment in Mixsawbah far outweighs the short-term impacts to the fishery that anglers may see," said Lake Michigan Fisheries Biologist Brian Breidert. "Fortunately, the trout and salmon adult fish harvest is made up of fish between 2 and 5 years old, resulting in generation overlaps during spawning migrations. Careful planning will allow Mixsawbah hatchery to be up and running in time to receive salmon eggs in the fall of 2006."

More Lake Michigan fishing information:
<http://www.IN.gov/dnr/fishwild/fish/lkmich/open.html>

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